

Homily for June 21, 2015

For most of us, it would be difficult to point to any one person as most important in helping us to become a person of faith. After I had young children, I remember hearing that a father must be aware that his children will most likely base their understanding of God on him. Though I am sure that that is not always true, statistics tell us that if a father is a person of faith, his children are likely to be people of faith; and if he is not a person of faith, even though their mother is, the children are likely to be like their father, people without faith. I think you know why I began the homily in this way: today is Father's Day.

As a father and a grandfather I am very much aware that statements such as those that I have just made can be one more burden to add to the load that many fathers feel, and just this week I read in "CNRS International Magazine" that life today, all over the world, is exceedingly stressful. To some their life is like being caught in a spider's web; to others it is like being hit by a tsunami. Clearly, however, it is not fathers only who feel burdened and stressed. Most if not all of us, at least at times, feel as if we are on a boat on a stormy sea, a boat that is in danger of sinking. And it is certainly true that heart disease and high blood pressure, both often caused in part by stress, are on the increase.

Though in our thinking we often alternate between the thought that we live in the best of times and the thought that we live in the most stressful of times, the stresses and responsibilities of life are not the products of modern times. Job, the speaker in our first reading, had great concerns about his children. In the first chapter of the book of Job we learn that Job's children often gathered for parties. Because of his concern for them,

Job would send for [his children] and sanctify them, rising early and offering sacrifices for every one of them. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts."

Job did this habitually (1:5).

Job was also a man of great wealth. But suddenly Job must have felt as if he had been hit by a tsunami: All of his possessions were either destroyed or stolen, his servants were killed, and all his children who had gathered in celebration were killed when a storm destroyed their brother's home, where they had gathered. Then Job himself was stricken with a dreadful skin disease. His wife even said to him, "Are you still holding to your innocence? Curse God and did! (2:9). At this point, the book tells us, his friends "met and journeyed together to give him sympathy and comfort" (2:11c). His friends, however, told him that he must have done something terrible to deserve all this. In other words, they told Job that obviously he had just seemed like a Godly man. These friends must be the ones of

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whom it is said, With friends like this, who needs enemies? I think we can understand the words of Job: “After this Job opened his mouth and cursed his day. Job spoke out and said: ‘Perish the day on which I was born . . .’” (3:1-3). “I loath my life,” he lamented again and again (10:1). As his friends berated him for his lack of penitence, Job cried out,

Today especially my complaint is bitter,
Would that I knew how to find him,
that I might come to his dwelling!
I would set out my case before him,
fill my mouth with arguments;
I would learn the words he would answer me,
understand what he would say to me (23:2-5).

Job bitterly complained and again and again asked, “Why?” But through all his suffering and pain, he also said,

As God lives, who takes away my right,
the Almighty, who has made my life bitter,
So long as I still have life breath in me,
the breath of God in my nostrils,
My lips shall not speak falsehood,
nor my tongue utter deceit!
Far be it from me to account you right;
till I die I will not renounce my innocence (27:2-5).

It is in this context that God responded to Job in our first reading. There is no response to Job’s questions of why. Instead God responded with a series of questions that, of course, Job could not answer, and Job responded, acknowledging that his is a limited understanding. Then God said to Job’s so-called friends, “My anger blazes against you and your two friends! You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7b).

I return to the book of Job again and again. When the storms of life would overwhelm me, I am reminded of Job’s words in the midst of the pious condemnations of his friends:

As for me, I know that my vindicator lives,
and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust.

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This will happen when my skin has been stripped off,
and from my flesh I will see God:
will see for myself,
my own eyes, not another's, will behold him (19:25-27).

And I hear my Lord say, "Quiet! Be Still." May it be so!